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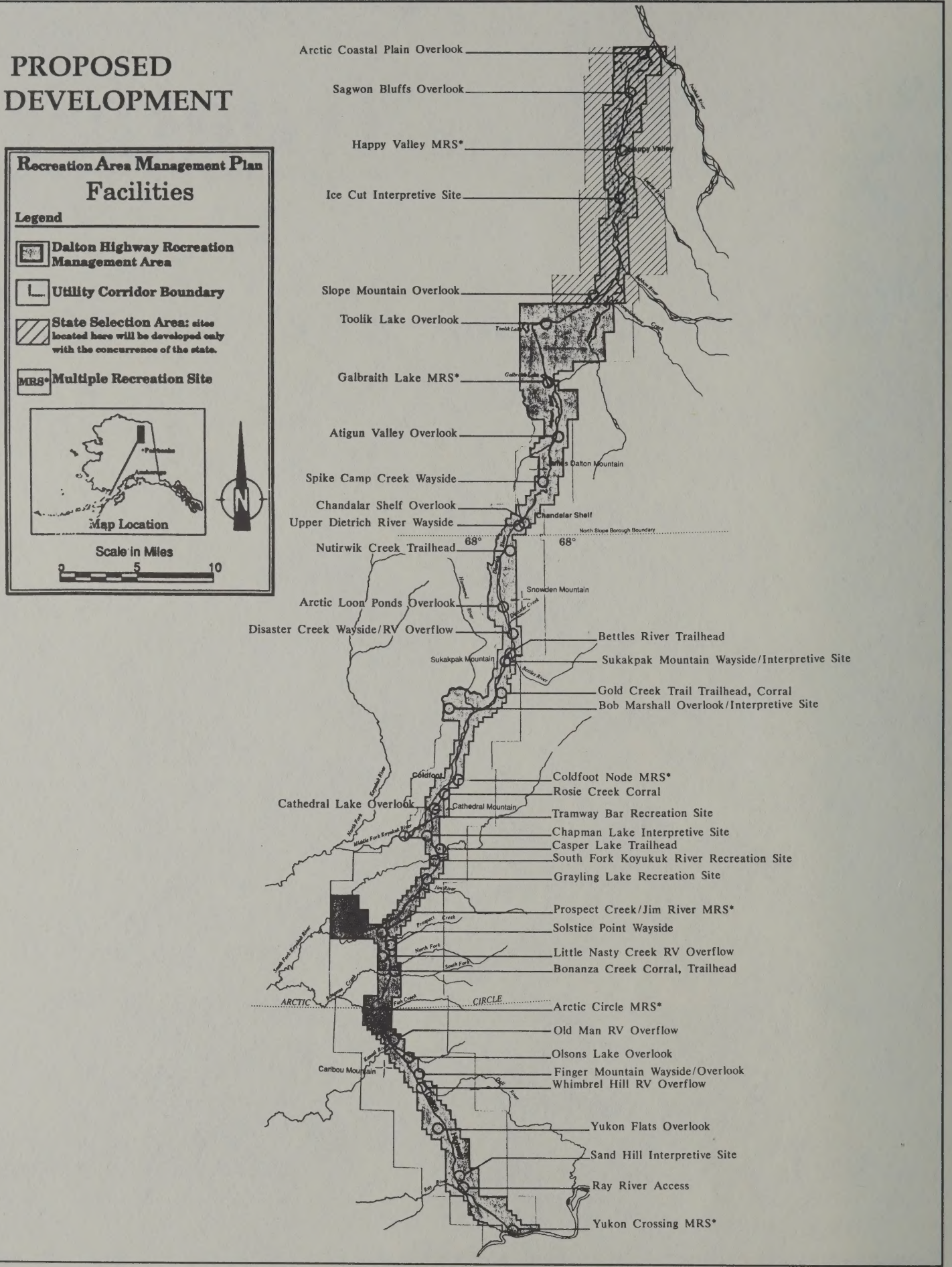
Issue 34 January 1992

Try watching wildlife for winter fun

In Alaska a nose-to-nose encounter with a moose or a glimpse of an eagle, wolf, or other wild animal can add the spark of life to an otherwise dark and gloomy winter day. For tips on watching wildlife in winter, see pages 6 and 7.

u.s. department of the interior • bureau of land management

PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT



Dalton Highway

BLM plans for travelers on highway to arctic

The number of people traveling up the Dalton Highway to check out northern Alaska and to find new recreational opportunities has been increasing each year. Traffic may increase even more sharply next summer as Alaska and Canada promote Rendezvous '92, the year-long celebration of the 50th anniversary of the completion of the Alaska Highway in 1942. Many visitors may decide to keep on going as far north as they can.

The Bureau of Land Management hopes to meet the needs of current travelers as well as anticipated future demands on the public lands it administers along the Dalton Highway. At the same time, BLM must ensure visitor safety, manage the resources, and protect the integrity of the energy transportation corridor. To define the needs and plan for future management, the BLM recently completed its Dalton Highway Recreation Area Management Plan.

This plan was developed and written after the Utility Corridor Resource Management Plan identified the increasing need for recreational activity sites along the Dalton Highway.

BLM estimates that approximately 11,000 visitors arrive at the Yukon Crossing by privately owned vehicles each year. Of those, about 4,400 go another 59 miles to the Arctic Circle. Most turn back, but about 2,000 continue on to the Coldfoot commercial area, 60 miles north.

Approximately 5,400 visitors travel the entire length of the road, from Fairbanks to Prudhoe Bay, on commercial tour buses between June and September each year.

- For Rendezvous '92, BLM will complete a temporary visitor contact station and a recreation vehicle overflow area at the Yukon Crossing, 139 miles north of Fairbanks, and a wayside/recreation vehicle overflow area with interpretation display at the Arctic Circle.
- As funding becomes available, other RV overflows will be placed at Whimbrell Hill, Old Man Camp, Little Nasty Creek, Prospect Creek/Jim River, Coldfoot, Disaster Creek and Galbraith Lake. Other waysides will be built at Finger Mountain, Solstice Point, Sukakpak Mountain and Galbraith Lake. A recreation site with rest room and litter facilities will be placed at the area where the highway crosses South Fork Koyukuk River.
- Interpretive sites that explain the natural history of the Arctic will be placed at Finger Mountain, Arctic Circle, Solstice Point Wayside and Sukakpak Mountain Wayside.

Many similar projects are planned for development within 10 years. In developing the schedule, BLM considered safety, current and projected user demand, project cost, available staffing and site location.

Another major factor will be the status of the Dalton Highway for public travel.

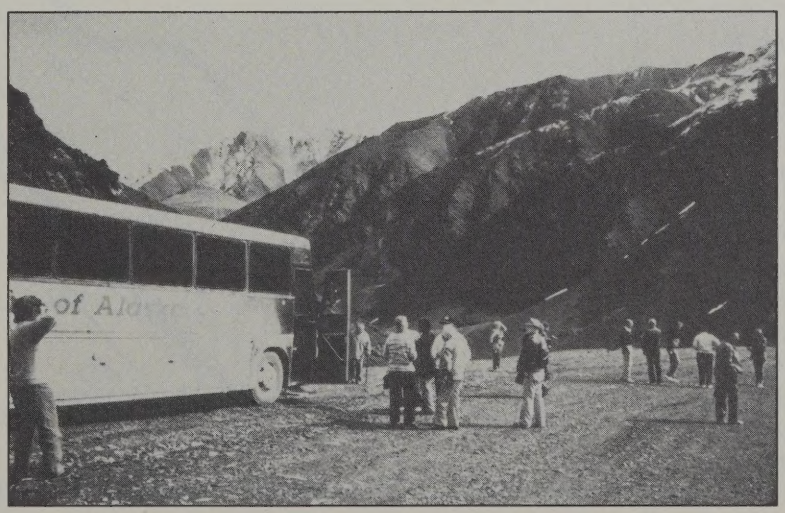
Projects proposed for the northern part of the road will not be built if the road remains closed.

BLM expects the total number of visitors to triple in the next 10 years if the road north of Disaster Creek (mile 211 Dalton Highway) is opened to public travel by the State of Alaska.

At an open house sponsored by BLM's Arctic District in Fairbanks Dec. 12, the district staff responsible for the plan answered questions on an informal basis, and gave the public information on visitor facilities and recreation improvements planned for the next 10 years.

Summary documents of the recreation area management plan and a brochure showing points of interest along the Dalton Highway are available at BLM's Public Affairs offices in Anchorage, telephone (907) 271-5555, or Fairbanks, telephone (907) 474-2231.

—Sharon Durgan Wilson



Tourists at Atigun Pass

They're the silent riders of Anchorage Campbell Tract

Horseback riders pass like shadows through snowy woods in the heart of the city

One summer day, two years ago, Laddie took a tumble while galloping down a hill on the Campbell Tract. Panicked, the nine-year-old gelding tore through the woods leaving his mistress, Elody Clayton dazed, with her face dripping blood. It took an hour before Clayton's riding partner retrieved Laddie. A bloody and bruised Clayton did what horseback riders would do, she got back on Laddie and she and her partner resumed their ride through the Campbell Tract.

Usually horseback riding on the Campbell Tract isn't so dramatic or eventful. In fact, BLM employee Les Eddins calls horseback riders the tract's silent users. Except for some tracks and maybe a broken twig here and there, "You'll almost never hear them and you'll probably never see them" says Eddins.

BLM Outdoor recreation specialist Jake Schlapfer, who patrols the tract, concurs. "I don't see many horses."

But they're there. Eddins figures the numerous horses residing within 5 miles of the tract represent a majority of the silent users.

Eddins, who is himself a horse owner, realized the tract's virtues two years ago when he took his own horse on a trek from south Anchorage through Campbell Tract to Eagle River.

The diverse topography of the tract with its spruce and birch forests, bogs, creekside and cleared areas made for a scenic and peaceful ride.

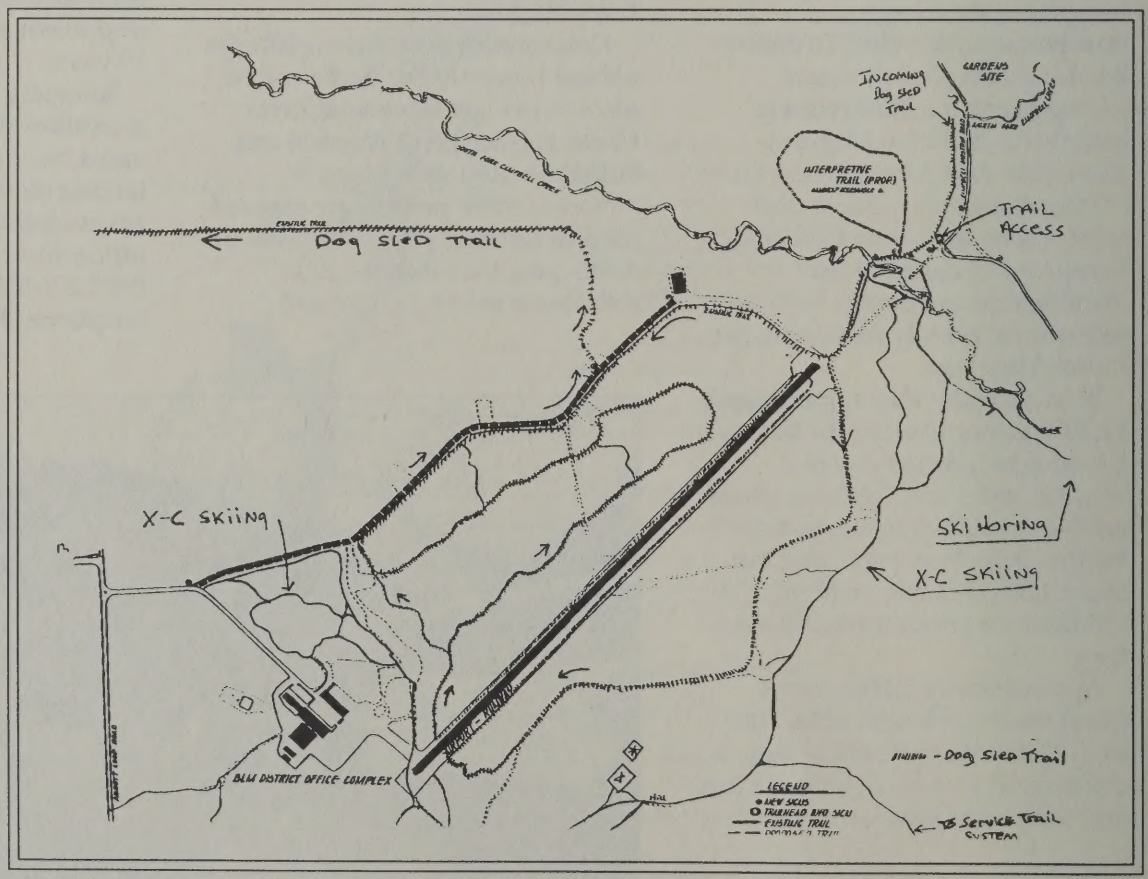
"The beauty of the tract is its accessibility," says Eddins. "Use is casual. People get off from work and ride for a couple of hours."

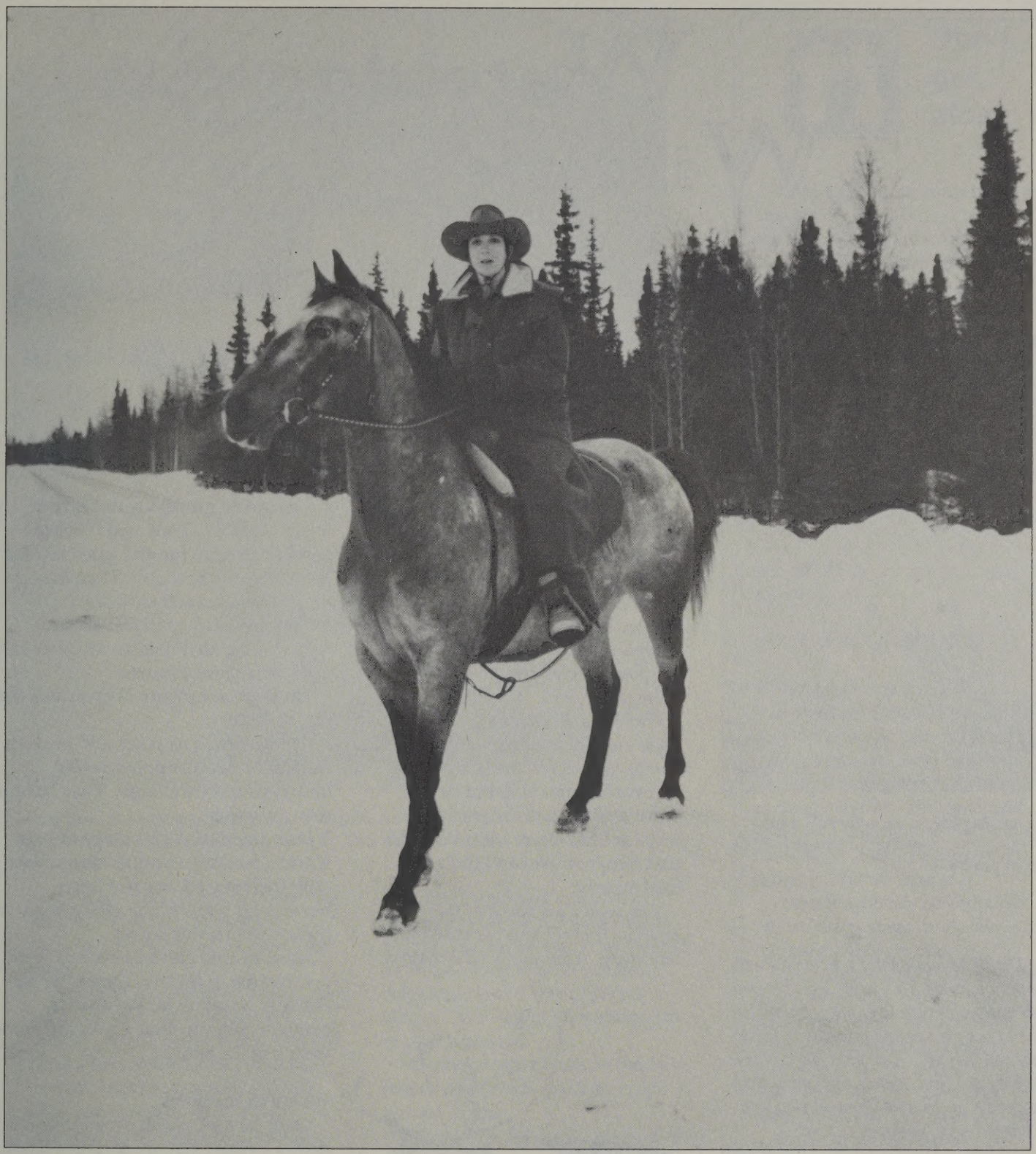
Clayton, who boards Laddie at the nearby F Bar J Stable says, "During the summer I ride every day. " She doesn't ride as often in the winter, preferring to ride in temperatures above freezing.

Clayton generally rides about 6 miles during an hour's outing and doesn't prefer any special area on the tract because she says she likes it all. Like most riders, she frequently avoids the tract's many trails so as to reduce encounters with skiers, mushers and skijorers. Besides the occasional moose or dog, it's usually just the horse and the rider. (Horses may not use the groomed ski trails in winter because they would damage the trails.)

"You couldn't ask for a better place to ride. It's beautiful with the mountains and woods. And there's lots of it," says Clayton of the 730 acres managed by the BLM's Anchorage District within the city of Anchorage.

—Danielle Allen



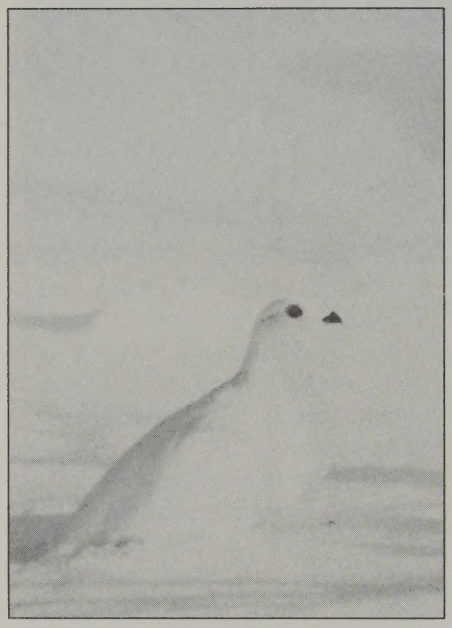


Elody Clayton often brings Laddie to the Campbell Tract for a little winter outing. She thinks it's beautiful riding there when the snow sparkles on the spruce boughs, and the mountains fill the eastern sky.

Use-designations for Campbell Tract trails are made in accordance with the management plan completed in 1988.

Watching Wildlife in Winter

Spotting wild animals can put sparkle in the short days of northern winter



Since Ptarmigan are active all winter, they change to winter plumage to hide from predators.

The BLM has started a new national program called Watchable Wildlife that encourages people to enjoy our wildlife heritage by observing animals in their natural habitat. This article offers tips to help you find, watch, and enjoy the activities of the wild animals who live around us in Alaska in winter.

—Editor

Many Alaska residents know that one way to beat those wintertime blues is to go outdoors into Alaska's beauty.

Although many of the animals that we see here in the summer move south for winter, the best-adapted species remain and survive quite well.

Watching Alaska's wildlife can be done anywhere any time the mood strikes you. Even the most casual observer cannot help but be impressed with the marvelous ways animals cope with Alaska's cold temperatures and reduced food supply.

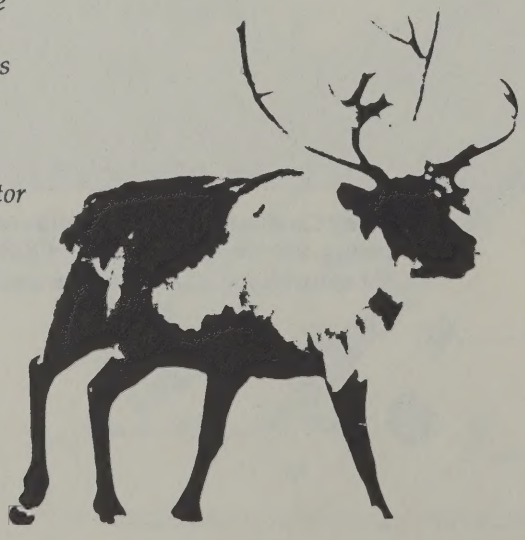
You won't see some of the animals that remain because they hibernate. Among the hibernators are the arctic ground squirrel and hoary marmot. They will retire to nests lined with fur and grass located below the freeze depth. Then they go into a deep sleep; their body temperatures drop to just above freezing and their hearts will beat only once every few minutes.

But there are plenty of creatures that remain active.

Animals such as pikas and beavers stockpile a food supply in their underground dwellings. They have it relatively easy.

Ptarmigan take advantage of both worlds, walking about on the surface with their large furry feet, then burrowing into the insulating snow on the coldest winter nights.

Hard-to-find animals such as wolf, fox, marten, mink and river otter are easier to detect in winter than in summer because their tracks are more visible in the snow.

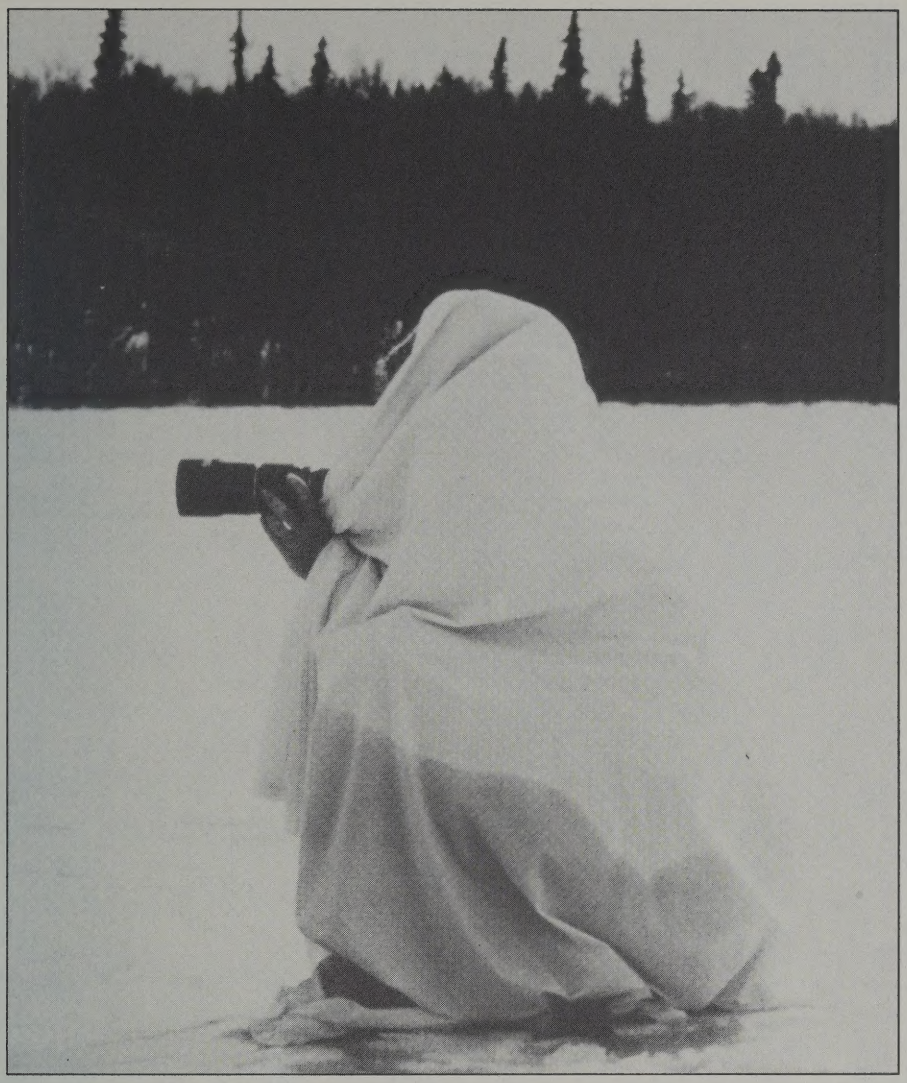


Where to see them

Look for Dall sheep on windswept ridges where they can continue feeding on exposed grasses, lichens and plants.

Moose move to lowlands and river basins. Their long legs allow them to wade through deep snow, and the long hollow guard hairs of their coat, their thickened fur and a layer of fat ward off temperatures down to -70° F.

In dense shrub thickets in the river bottoms you may see rock ptarmigan, willow ptarmigan, or even gyrfalcons



Learn from the ptarmigan when you want to take winter photos of animals—use a bed sheet to camouflage yourself. You may also want a small folding chair or pad to sit on.

and snowy owls. Occasionally you may even see the interesting patterns of their wing prints in the snow.

Mountain goats move out of the alpine tundra into old-growth forests, joining the chestnut-backed chickadees, brown creepers, red-breasted nuthatches and golden-crowned kinglets. Also watch for red- and white-winged crossbills and pine siskins, as well as common redpolls, Steller's jays, downy woodpeckers and northern hawk owls.

If you're in a spruce-hardwood forest, look for the tracks of marten, fox, hare and lynx. Birds you may find there include pine grosbeaks, gray jays, downy and three-toed woodpeckers.

Coastal wetlands and marine waters are where the water birds winter; sea ducks winter in ice-free bays; also look for surf scoters, mergansers, and three species of eiders. Bald eagles stay along the coastal areas too.

Watch for other birds in the few freshwater ponds and lakes that remain open.

Ravens will take advantage of the food associated with people around towns and dumps.

Pick an outdoor route and observe it as many times as you can during the winter. Note the changes. A new track one day, a browsed twig the next. There is lots to observe all winter long Soon the days will lengthen bringing the promise of spring.

—Ed Bovy

Don't get close

Although the animals listed in this article are adapted to survive Alaska's winter, winter nevertheless puts stress on their bodies. Food is scarce and energy must be conserved to keep warm. Avoid approaching animals too closely—fleeing from you means they have less energy to avoid predators or stay warm. Invest in good quality spotting scopes and telephoto lenses to see animals better.

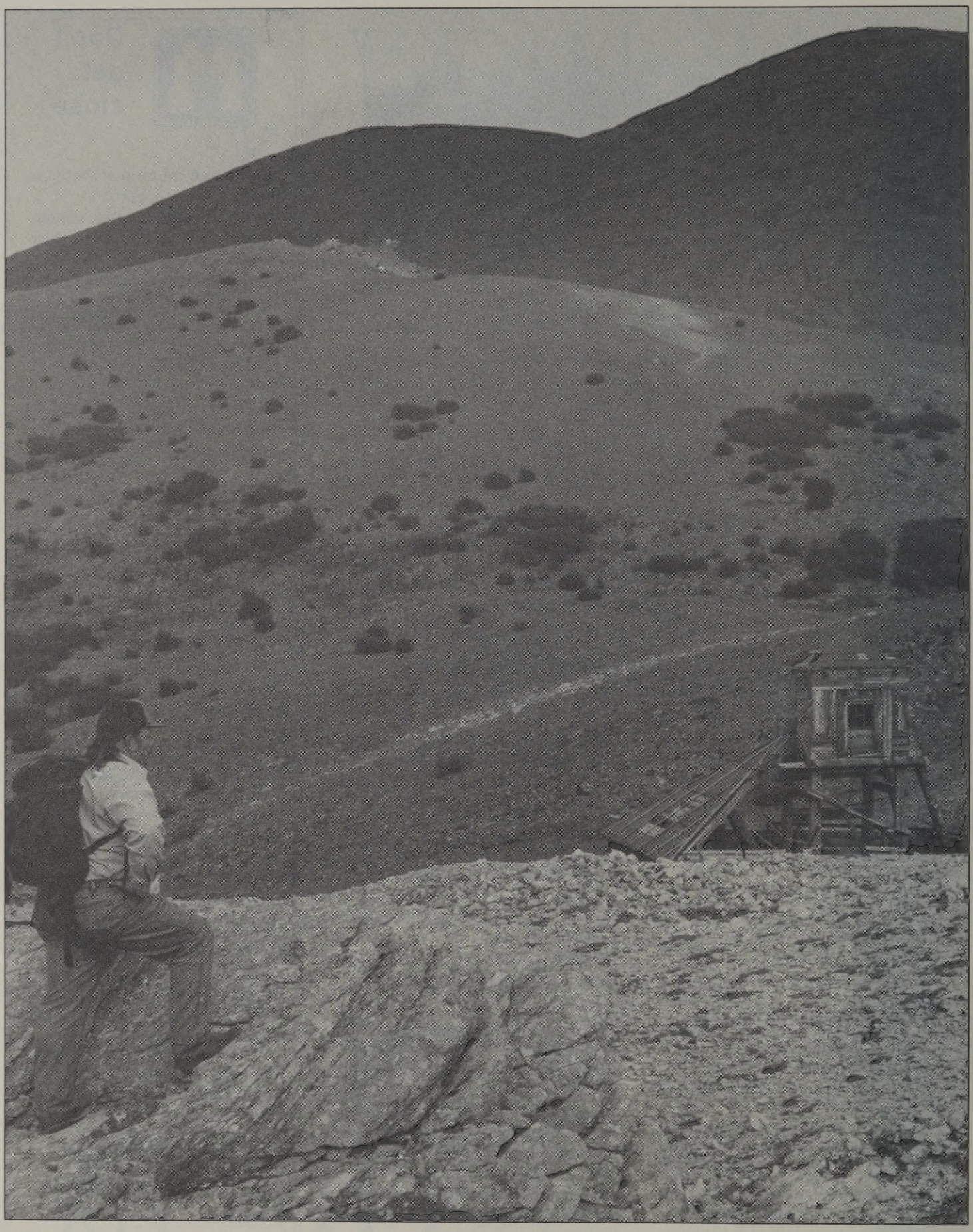
Nature's insulation layer

The deep snows of winter act as a blanket of insulation on the quiet landscape. Twigs, grasses, dead plants and wood all help form spaces between the snow and the ground. The earth still radiates heat, melting the bottom snow layer and creating what is called subnivian space.

There it's just above freezing, but on many days that's the warmest place around.

More animals spend the winter in the subnivian world than above the snow. Spiders and springtails remain active and form the basis for a food web. They are eaten by voles and shrews who in turn may become a winter meal for ermine. All can become a tasty treat for predators with excellent hearing: coyotes, foxes, and owls.

Sometimes some snow will collapse, creating a small opening into the subnivian world. Look for tracks where an animal briefly came above the surface.



BLM archaeologist Howard Smith looks over the headframe, the works at the top of the shaft, of the first lode mine on the Seward Peninsula, a relic of the heyday of gold mining, around the turn of the century.

'Adventures in the Past' begins on Seward Peninsula

Out on the Seward Peninsula where the western edge of Alaska juts into the Bering Sea, several old railroad cars sit on the tundra. Grasses grow between the rusted wheels. Twisted iron rails decorate the ditches along the few gravel roads that pierce the empty landscape.

In another area, fragments of an old wood-stave pipe create tracks across a wilderness of windswept grass and chest-high alder bushes. Here and there, ditches, small hollows and rocks form circular patterns in the tundra.

To the untrained eye, these may be little more than oddities. To local residents, they have been fixtures of the landscape since childhood. To a BLM archaeologist, they contain a wealth of fascinating information.

These are all artifacts that document the activities of man from a few hundred years before the time of Christ to the early 1900s on the Seward Peninsula. They are the keys that will unlock the mysteries of this peninsula

Now, working under the Bureau of Land Management's *Adventures in the Past* program, Kobuk District archaeologist Howard Smith is identifying, researching and documenting these cultural resources. The term "cultural resources" means any items that show evidence of having been made, used or altered by humans.

This past summer, Smith began gathering information and documenting a variety of cultural resources including old buildings and equipment from early gold mining activity and evidence of early inhabitants, the ancestors of the present-day Inupiat people.

A major product of Smith's research will be video documentation of interviews with old-timers and cultural resources associated with the mining history of the Seward Peninsula.

Smith points out grass-covered depressions in the tundra that resemble small craters from a shower of meteors. "These have remains of semi-subterranean pit houses that were probably occupied by people who fished along the coast and in the inland rivers, and hunted marine mammals as well as caribou from the uplands," he says.

Adventures in the past is a public awareness program sponsored by BLM to promote the preservation of historic and prehistoric cultural resources.

He shows the crumbling buildings left from the Omilak Silver Mine, started in 1881.

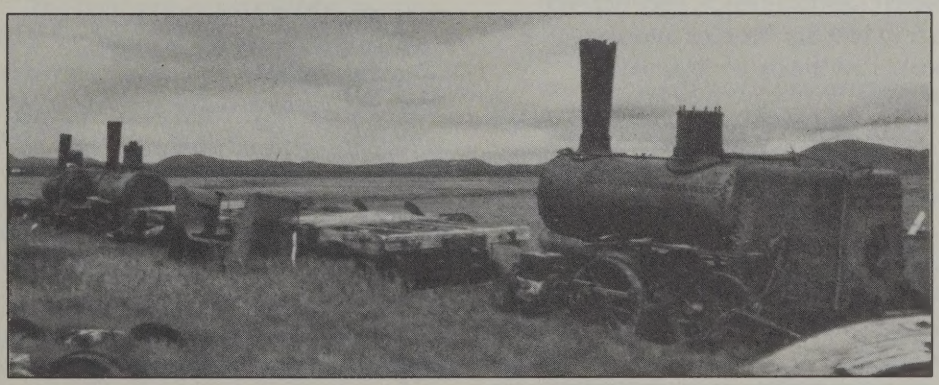
In the 1890s, gold prospecting began in earnest, with the first real strike occurring in April 1898, near a mining camp called Council City. The first prospectors mined large amounts of gold until word spread to the outside world in the winter of 1898, and the gold rush expanded the population of the Nome community to a high of about 30,000 in the summer of 1900.

Water used to separate gold from the gold-bearing gravels was carried several hundreds of miles by ditches constructed during the first decade of this century along the length of nearly every stream of any size.

"These ditches remain today as one of the most visible reminders of the heyday of mining on the peninsula, and of the times when Nome was a thriving metropolis and optimism was unbounded," Smith says.

Smith is enthusiastic about the possibilities of new program he's starting. "One goal of the America the Beautiful initiative and its accompanying Adventures in the Past program is to identify recreational opportunities that involve cultural resources, such as hiking, photography and general sight-seeing," Smith says. "Another is to use these resources to help the rural communities improve their economies." He says BLM hopes to form partnerships with the mining industry, Native corporations and local tour companies that will encourage not only the preservation of these cultural resources, but the development of activities that allow people to enjoy the resources while they learn from them. It is only natural that BLM use these living classrooms to teach history, outdoor education and cultural awareness. BLM's efforts will help the communities economically, while giving people a chance to enjoy an Adventure in the Past.

—Sharon Durgan Wilson



The remains of the Council City & Solomon River Railroad, abandoned in 1907.

Scouts discover down side of digs

Ruth Kajdan and two Boy Scouts from Troop 553 measure their excavation at the Sourdough Campground site.

They dug through roots. Unearthed glacial, sandy and gravel-like soil 40 centimeters (1.3 feet) below the surface.

They bent their backs from nine in the morning until three in the afternoon(including breaks). And at the end of the four-day dig, Tim Weld said, "I think I found out I don't want to be an archaeologist."

They are the Gakona, Alaska, Troop No. 553 Boy scouts and Ruth Kajdan. Ruth Kajdan's father, Larry Kajdan, scout leader and recreation planner for BLM-Alaska's Glennallen District Office, encouraged her to join her brother and the other scouts on the excavation last August.

Ruth, now 12, and a want-to-be archaeologist and paleontologist says the dig was fun.

Fourteen-year-old twins Mat and Luke Weld and their brother Tim said it was fun too. However, Tim says, "I wouldn't want to do it for a living."

Glennallen District Office archaeologist Patricia McCoy supervised the 11, 12 and 14-year- old volunteers during the testing on National Register site GUL 225. On this spot a depression was found that was thought a possible house pit, in the Sourdough Campground.

The site had to be examined for possible cultural remains before BLM could upgrade the campground. Archaeologist Patricia McCoy hoped an actual dig would help the scouts "become culturally aware of current Ahtna and past Athabascan inhabitants of the Glennallen area." She also hoped they would learn to appreciate laws against collecting artifacts from public lands.

Boy Scout Mat Weld said, "I think it [the dig] was important. Archaeology is interesting, looking at it in the sense of history."

The scouts already knew how to identify Native arrowheads and projectile heads. Several of them had visited the BLM's Landmark Gap Trail excavation in the nearby Tangle Lakes Archaeological District.

Ruth Kajdan said, "I used to think it was a cinch to find things, and now I know you have to dig. You really appreciate it when you find something. I didn't know how hard it was."

McCoy admits the work went slowly and was tedious. So she grouped her young volunteers by twos and threes to excavate the 50 x 50 centimeter test units. She had set out units in 5 x 5 meter grids.

Ruth said, "The first day we went to the site and marked the spots. Then, the archaeologist explained what we were looking for."

Teen scout Luke Weld explained, "We were looking for fire pits instead of arrow or spearheads." He added that spearheads would have been used more in tundra areas. Fire pits were the predominant features in semi-subterranean house pits used by some seasonally nomadic Native groups in the Glennallen area.

The scouts switched teams from day to day, and troweled their units in 10-centimeter (4 inch) levels. Ruth explained, "We did dig deeper each day " One person dug and another picked out the charcoal and sifted the fine particles through a screen. They recorded the exact location of everything that was 1/16 of an inch or bigger. The third team person recorded the data.

Tim Weld said, "I don't like all the measuring and detailed work because I don't like math."

Mat echoed brother Tim's sentiments, "I am not sure I would want to be an archaeologist. The graphing was complex and difficult." He was talking about the task of plotting each feature's location on graph paper.

Ruth said, "When we finished the digging we had only found charcoal of a more recent period where someone dumped ashes."

However, six Gakona Boy scouts and Ruth learned some new lessons in the great outdoors and say they would do it again.

—Ella Wright

Can eagles tolerate people? BLM study seeks answer

Richard Frenzel prepares to release an adult bald eagle fitted with a radio transmitter.

When you're monitoring every event associated with an eagle's nest for twenty four hours at a stretch, you're "always wet, always being bitten by mosquitoes and the temperature ranges from 85 or 90 degrees during the day to 28 degrees at night," says Bob Steidl.

That kind of work takes a lot of dedication, so BLM's Glennallen District Office is fortunate to have Steidl working on their eagle research. He enjoys this work even though it involves enduring such conditions.

Bob Steidl is a doctoral candidate at Oregon State University and has been studying eagles in the Glennallen District for the past three years.

Actually, the Glennallen district has had an ongoing interest in raptors since the 1970s, but it has been only the last three years that a full scale study to assess the influence of human activity on bald eagles has been going on under a cooperative agreement with Oregon State University, through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Oregon Cooperative Wildlife Research Unit. Begun in the field season of 1989 with a pilot study, the project will continue through the 1992 field season. A report will be produced by late 1993.

The Gulkana River drainage and associated lakes is one of four important eagle breeding grounds in central Alaska. Some studies in the past had indicated that eagle productivity and population numbers may be negatively influenced by human activity, and that even minor human presence can significantly alter eagle foraging behavior. This creates significant concern because the incubation and nesting period for breeding eagles coincides with peak recreational use of the Gulkana River in June and July.

BLM expects recreation use to increase in this area. Repairs and upgrading were started last summer for the Sourdough Campground on the Denali Highway near Paxson. When the campground reopens in 1993, recreational river use could increase even more.

The bald eagle is classified by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as a sensitive species in Alaska, and as such merits special attention by state and federal agencies. Management of the species is also mandated under the Migratory Bird Conservation Act and the Bald Eagle Protection Act.

"The eagle study on the Gulkana gives us an opportunity to manage eagles and people in an active rather than reactive fashion," said Steidl. He pointed out that current human-use levels in this area are low compared to areas in the lower 48, but as human use increases, so will impact on the eagles.

BLM hopes to develop management strategies that protect bald eagles and avoid allowing human-eagle interactions to reach a level of crisis.

—K.J. Mushovic

What the eagle study seeks to learn—

1. The influence of human activity on bald eagles along an interior river, including:
   - the effects of human activity on time and activity budgets of nesting pairs
   - the productivity of pairs nesting in areas of high and low human activity
   - the distribution and numbers of breeding and non-breeding eagles in areas with different levels of human activity
   - the responses of breeding and non-breeding eagles to different types of human activity.
2. The ecology of bald eagles nesting in riverine systems, including:
   - productivity in different habitat types
   - diets
   - use of anadromous fish carcasses by breeding and non-breeding eagles and their effects on distribution and numbers of non-breeders
   - temporal changes in distribution and numbers of non-breeding eagles.

frontier flashes

BLM-Alaska has just released a new full-color **map showing land ownership** in its **Steese/White Mountains District.** This district is bounded by the Alaska Highway, the Yukon River and the Canadian border.

This is the first map in a new series that shows land status down to sections (640-acre parcels). It is also the first land status map at this scale to be readily available to the public. BLM hopes to complete maps for all Alaska districts within the next 18 months.

For copies ($4.00 over-the-counter or $5.00 by mail) contact any of these offices:

- Public Services Section, Bureau of Land Management, Anchorage Federal Building, 222 West Seventh Ave. #13, Anchorage, AK 99513. Phone (907) 271-5960.
- Public Services Unit, Bureau of Land Management, Fairbanks Support Center, 1150 University Avenue, Fairbanks, AK 99709-3844, Phone (907) 474-2250.
- Bureau of Land Management, Tok Field Office, PO Box 309, Tok AK 99780. Phone (907) 883-5121.

Three new **open file reports** have just been published by BLM about Alaska's mineral potential:

- *Platinum and Palladium in Mafic-Ultramafic Igneous Rocks: Northwestern Alaska.* Thomas C. Mowatt. Open file report #37.
- *The Red Dog Deposit, Northwestern Alaska: Discovery, Delineation and Development Implications.* Mowatt, Thomas C.; Dygas, J.A.; and Gibson, C. Open File Report #38.
- *Mineral Resources of Western Arctic Alaska.* Mowatt, Thomas C. Dygas, J.A., Gibson, C. and Seidlitz, A.L. Open File Report #39.

All major libraries in the state have been sent copies of these reports. Copies can be obtained from the Bureau of Land Management Office of Public Affairs, 222 West 7th Ave. #13, Anchorage, AK 99513. Phone (970) 271-5555.

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BLM-Alaska has been chosen the **first federal agency** to begin entering data in the **Arctic Environmental Data Directory,** which will list on compact disk both published and unpublished files and reports about arctic research and management. It will include journal articles, internal agency publications, abstracts and citations of studies, land use plans and inventory data.

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BLM's Alaska Resources Library **is one of seven centers established by the U.S. Department of the Interior to receive publications related to** Total Quality Management. For more information call (907) 271-5025.

▼

George P. Oviatt is BLM's **new deputy state director for cadastral survey** in Alaska. He will manage operations completing official U.S. government surveys affecting state and Native land conveyances. Oviatt is transferring from the Santa Fe, New Mexico office.

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